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Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations

Culture of peace

Letter dated 23 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Further to my letter dated 11 November 2005 transmitting the letter of Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, regarding an unfortunate incidence of defamation against Islam in the Danish press, I would appreciate the distribution of the aforementioned letter as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 42 and 43 (see annex).

(*Signed*) Maged **Abdelaziz**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 23 November 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I should like to bring to your kind attention a recent regrettable incident, which will strongly hurt the feelings of Muslims all over the world. A Danish newspaper has published a number of offensive caricature drawings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Prayers be upon him). Our Embassy in Copenhagen has learned that a Danish publishing house intends to compile those offensive caricatures in a book for children "so that children can learn that there are no taboos when it comes to freedom of opinion and expression, and that democracy embraces both religious and the mundane issues"

You would agree with me that respect for freedom of expression does not mean or justify insult to the beliefs and feelings of over one billion Muslims in the world through offending the person of Prophet Muhammad. We could understand, but not necessarily appreciate, that freedom of expression might entail criticism of the followers of a given faith. However, neither we nor the civilized international community can condone mockery of a religion or its symbols as it in no way comes under freedom of expression but rather under incitement of hatred. In every civilized country, there is, or there should be, a code of ethics for the media to be strictly observed.

I am bringing this gross behaviour to your attention in the context of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 56/6, entitled "Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilization", which embodies the collective will of the international community and its determination to enhance and maintain this dialogue. Resolution 56/6 recalls "the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 8 September 2000, which considers, inter alia, that tolerance is one of the fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century and should include the active promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language ..."

I may also quote some pertinent paragraphs from the same resolution:

- "Governments shall promote, encourage and facilitate dialogue among civilizations." (Article 6)
- "The media has an indispensable and instrumental role in the promotion of dialogue among civilizations ..." (Article 8)

Again, Security Council resolution 1624 (2005), on the legal prohibition of terrorist incitement, adopted unanimously on 14 September 2005 by the Security Council meeting at the summit level, "Calls upon all States to continue international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations, in an effort to prevent the indiscriminate targeting of different religions and cultures ..." (para. 3)

We do not expect any country to take punitive or disciplinary action against a newspaper as we fully know that the right to the freedom of expression is incorporated in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948 and 1966, respectively. Nonetheless, and in compliance with General Assembly resolution 56/6 and Security Council resolution 1624 (2005)

cited above, we had expected an official Danish statement that would emphasize the necessity and indeed the obligation for respecting all religions and refraining from offending their followers, with a view to avoiding escalation that could entail serious ramifications.

I have been keen on putting you fully in the picture because I vividly recall the efforts you have personally been investing since the declaration by the United Nations of the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and the Group of Eminent Persons appointed by you, which had produced the invaluable book entitled *Crossing the Divide*. We are determined to cross the divide and not to play into the hands of those who seek to widen the divide. That is why we sincerely hope, and indeed expect, all States Members of the United Nations to work vigorously to achieve this sublime goal.

(*Signed*) Ahmed **Aboul Gheit**
Minister for Foreign Affairs